

Operating budget poses a challenge for lawmakers

More difficult decisions are in store for lawmakers this year, as our state’s economy continues to slow and citizens statewide demand more services. Just six months into our two-year budget cycle, it looks as though lawmakers will be forced to cut expenditures in order keep the budget in balance. The collection of tax revenues has been steadily slowing due to our cooling economy. Meanwhile, health care costs are rising substantially, we’ve incurred \$10 million in emergency expenses fighting wildfires this summer, and security issues at schools and other public facilities have become a paramount concern.

It will require a genuine bipartisan effort in the coming months to bring this budget back into balance and make it sustainable over the long term without the need for new taxes.

2001-03 Budget Picture

The latest economic forecast released in September showed a drop in tax revenue of more than \$100 million in the current biennium, and that was before economists had a chance to factor in the effects of the Sept. 11 attack on our state and national economy.

2001-03 Projected Tax Revenues	\$22,021,800
2001-03 Budget Expenditures	\$22,786,783
Difference	– \$765 million
Unrestricted General Fund Reserve	\$66 million
Emergency Reserve	\$390 million

Rep. Dave Mastin

P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504
(360) 786-7836

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Rep. Dave Mastin

P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504
(360) 786-7836

mastin_da@leg.wa.gov

**Leadership and
Committee Assignments**
Co-Majority Leader
Appropriations Committee
Rules Committee

16th District Legislative Report

*For the people of the 16th Legislative District comprising
Asotin, Columbia, Franklin, Garfield and Walla Walla counties.*

November 2001

Dear friends,

The terrible attacks on the United States have brought a new perspective to the challenges that face our state’s Legislature. We are responding to the effects of a statewide drought and high-cost energy shortage. And we’re working to improve our education system and boost our economy by providing relief and reforms to help our family farms and making improvements to our transportation system.

These are small concerns compared to the tragedies that struck our nation’s capital, New York City and rural Pennsylvania. Those who have suffered and our national leaders continue to need our prayers and support.

This newsletter provides a report on many of the items that still require our attention in the Legislature. As you read it, please remember how privileged we are, as Americans, to have the ability to resolve issues and address our citizens’ needs through self-governance and elected representation.

My thanks to those of you who have taken the time to communicate with me over the last several months. I’m honored to represent the citizens of the 16th District, and I always welcome your comments and questions.

Sincerely,

Dave Mastin
Dave Mastin
State Representative

Citizens deserve a voice in transportation tax decision

Although we don't have the same traffic congestion problems as the central Puget Sound region, we do have issues of safety and we understand the importance of a strong transportation system to our economy. We want a responsible long-term transportation plan that protects jobs, keeps people and products moving, and includes efforts toward greater efficiency and accountability in the construction and maintenance of our highways.

Efficiency has to be part of the solution. That's why we worked successfully to streamline the permitting process on highway construction. Cutting the time for permitting in half could save as much as 20 percent on the cost of major road projects. We also approved reforms that will allow us to better coordinate the design and build phases of projects, to reduce unnecessary cost overruns.

Before we consider raising taxes to fund new needed transportation improvements, there are other efficiency and accountability measures Republicans hope to adopt. This is where Republican and Democrat negotiators disagreed.

Among the efficiency and accountability safeguards Republicans sought were reforms to allow competitive bidding by private contractors for highway maintenance.

And perhaps most important, many of us believed voters should have the final say on any proposed new taxes. The governor and many of my Democrat colleagues did not agree and would not give their support to a plan that would require a vote of the people. In the end, the question of whether the people should be allowed to vote was the single issue that kept us in Olympia for this year's record-breaking session and ultimately led to an impasse.

Keep in Touch

**Representative
Dave Mastin**

E-mail:
mastin_da@leg.wa.gov

Olympia Office

3rd Floor Legislative Bldg.
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7836

District Office

26 E. Main St. #5
Walla Walla, WA 99362
(509) 527-4111

Toll-Free Hotline: 1-800-562-6000

The 2002 session begins on January 14

We will be returning to our Olympia office just prior to the beginning of the 2002 session on January 14.

Page program offers valuable experience for students

Since 1891, young people from across the state have come to Olympia to serve as pages for the Washington State House of Representatives. Paging presents students with a unique educational opportunity to participate in the legislative process.

Page duties vary, from ceremonial tasks, such as presenting the flags at the opening of the day's floor sessions, to operational responsibilities like distributing legislative documents and messages. Each job is vital to the efficient operation of the Legislature.

Pages also spend two hours each day in a classroom setting learning about the legislative process. In addition, pages have the opportunity to spend another hour in a quiet environment working on school assignments from home.

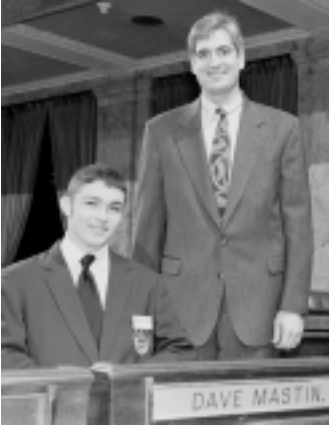
As the week-long experience draws to a close and pages return to their schools and communities, it is hoped that they will share their experiences and observations with others in an effort to contribute to a broader understanding of the legislative process.

To serve as a page for the House of Representatives, a student must:

- Have permission from a parent or guardian
- Have permission from school
- Apply and be selected for sponsorship by a current member of the House of Representatives
- Be at least 14 years of age and not have reached his or her 17th birthday

Unfortunately, we are limited in the number of pages each lawmaker is allowed to sponsor each year. If you know an eligible student who is interested, you may contact my office for an application or obtain one at the following website: <http://www.leg.wa.gov/house/hadm/pageform.htm>

Duane Tompkins of Walla Walla served as a legislative page in Olympia during the week of Jan. 15. He was one of three pages sponsored by Rep. Mastin this year. Because of the earthquake in February, the page program was suspended during the 2001 session.



Some successes and disappointments from 2001



Water reform is reality – finally

Common-sense reforms to our state's water policy were long overdue. The delays for acquiring or changing a water right from the Department of Ecology had created a backlog of more than 7,000 water rights permits.

Fortunately we adopted House Bill 1832, which is expected to reduce the permit backlog and expedite the water rights application process by creating two lines: one for new rights and the other for changes or transfers. The bill also clarifies the law to allow local water conservancy boards to do the legwork on water right changes and transfers. Local people can now help make decisions about local water use.



New certification aims to draw quality teachers to our public schools

In our ongoing effort to improve our public schools and provide the best opportunity for our children to learn, we adopted legislation that will help us attract and retain the most qualified teachers to the classroom. Senate Bill 5695 creates a statewide grant program to make it easier for classified school employees and successful professionals to enter the teaching profession.

This will help to alleviate the growing problem of teacher shortages in schools and enhance the learning experience for students by bringing individuals to the classroom who have successful real-world experience.



Measure to establish school accountability stalls

Among the disappointments this past year was our inability to adopt policies for dealing with schools that fail to meet new accountability standards. We have set our sights high with new academic learning requirements. Our next step is to set up a system of accountability that will allow us to assist parents and schools where test scores are not demonstrating improvement.

Education accountability will be a top priority for the Legislature during the 2002 session, which begins in January. We want local educators to know that we are counting on them to help students achieve excellence, and we will take steps to assist schools that fail to meet academic standards.



Agency regulations may take effect in spite of efforts to rein them in

An attempt by state agencies to adopt new onerous rules on landowners was of great concern to me and many lawmakers. We fought to postpone rules that would limit land use along privately owned shorelines and impose expensive new ergonomics requirements on farmers and other businesses. Unfortunately, we were unable to adopt legislation to stop these rules from taking effect. However, we have put agencies like the DOE and Department of Labor and Industries on notice that they should tread lightly when imposing new regulations on Washington citizens.



Permanent funding source approved for fairs

Two years ago, when the governor signed legislation cutting the parimutuel taxes at horse-racing tracks, it created a funding crunch for county fairs which had received part of that revenue. Since then, we've worked for an agreement that would provide a permanent funding source for our state's 72 youth fairs and agricultural shows. This year the Legislature agreed to provide ongoing funding of \$2 million annually for our fairs.